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Children Looked After (CLA) Sufficiency Strategy 2018 - 2021

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North East Lincolnshire Council's priorities are clear:

'Stronger economy and stronger communities'

1.0 Introduction & Context

To achieve this Strategy we need to work in new ways with partners in the public and private sectors, the voluntary and community sector, and with individuals, families and communities. We must support and enable the achievement of improved community outcomes with creativity and innovation.

We want North East Lincolnshire to be seen as an attractive place to live, work, visit and invest. We know that we have significant and exciting opportunities for investment and growth in North East Lincolnshire.

The Council's stronger economy / stronger communities' priorities are underpinned by a key strategic framework comprising the following:

- health and wellbeing strategy
- economic strategy
- prevention and early intervention strategy
- financial strategy
- safeguarding

Our [outcomes framework](#) is the means by which our priorities will be translated into action and delivered, developed and achieved in conjunction with our partners across sectors. This is intended to drive a culture of evidence-based decision-making that will enable elected members to take informed key decisions, knowing the risks and the opportunities for citizens, communities and businesses. Our commissioning plan will ensure and foster clear links between the outcomes framework and the resources available to achieve them.

The framework, sets out the five high level outcomes that we and our partners aspire to achieve to ensure prosperity and wellbeing for the residents of North East Lincolnshire.

The five outcomes are that all people in North East Lincolnshire will:

- Enjoy and benefit from a strong economy
- Feel safe and are safe
- Enjoy good health and well being
- Benefit from sustainable communities
- Fulfil their potential through skills and learning

2.0 Purpose of this strategy

The strategy sets out how North East Lincolnshire Council intends to meet its Sufficiency Duty¹ for the children we look after, improve the quality and choice of placements, ensure value for money and minimise the likelihood of suitable placements being unavailable locally.

This document should be read in conjunction with the "Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy" and forms an integral part of that strategic direction. It is North East Lincolnshire's vision that children are safe, families are supported and lives are transformed through providing help to all children and families through access to strong universal provision, providing help at the earliest point and lowest "level" of service provision so that help is provided quickly and children and families get the help they need to become independent of services. This strategy has been informed by the North East Lincolnshire Council's (NELC) "Valuing Care" project, a new approach to explaining, recording and tracking a child or young person's needs and outcomes that can be used to shape the support in place for individuals and inform sufficiency planning and value for money.²

Throughout 2017 – 2018 (and before) we have actively worked to:

- Maintain children in their family home.

Where this is not possible we have sought to:

- Place children in permanent or alternative family placements, and when appropriate;
- Place children in suitable residential accommodation or in the community
- Collaborate with partners to ensure better outcomes for all children and young people in our care
- Listen to our children and young people to create services that effectively support their needs
- Support children to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 years through a "Staying Put" scheme
- Support young people in residential care when reaching the age of 18 years to "Stay Close" and to develop the skills and confidence to transition into living independently when they are ready within the local community. This aspiration will apply for both young people placed in- and out-of-borough
- Complete our locality based risk assessments and enhance our external placement

¹ ["Sufficiency; statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children"](#) DCSFA March 2010

² NELC Valuing Care; Interim Report. December 2018

Valuing Care is a new approach to codifying, understanding and tracking the needs and outcomes of looked after children. We are using this to shape the support in place for individual children and young people, to inform sufficiency planning and improve value for money across the CLA cohort. By better capturing and reviewing the needs of looked after children, we will be able to make better decisions on support, placements and commissioning. The analysis from the Valuing Care project gives us a detailed view of the core needs of our CLA population. This has been used to inform this Sufficiency Strategy. It will also inform developments in practice and will feed into ongoing work on how placements are commissioned, providers are engaged and the recruitment and support of foster carers.

process seeking to ensure those CLA children out-of-borough have the opportunity to "Stay Close" or "Stay Put"

This has required us to work with children and families to help them stay together. We have worked with partners and communities to further develop early identification, early help and the provision of support to children and their families at the lowest level to help them develop resilience, find their own creative solutions and to achieve positive change.

When this has not been possible we have intervened decisively, giving children the best opportunity for timely permanence in an alternative family setting.

There is a clear governance role for the Corporate Parenting Board. There is a well-defined decision making processes in the council with clear links to the Children in Care Council. The Council regularly reviews how we deliver these functions and that there are tangible outcomes through active and regular feedback from the children and young people. Members of the Corporate Parenting Board will provide the collective leadership required to improve outcomes for children in care. Partners provide the additional commitment to children in care that a parent who is ambitious for their children would make.

3.0 Sufficiency Duty³

This statutory document seeks to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people by providing guidance on the implementation of section 22G of the Children Act 1989 ('the 1989 Act').¹ This section requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty').

4.0 North East Lincolnshire Council's Vision for Children Looked After

Our vision is that every child born today in North East Lincolnshire, and every citizen, will grow up and live in a community and an environment that enables them to live healthier for longer, have a job when they leave education and achieve their full potential throughout life. We want to improve outcomes for all children and young people in North East Lincolnshire, but we know that there are many groups of children who are particularly vulnerable and will find it more difficult to secure these positive outcomes, including children in care or on the edge of care. Where families go through difficult times, we will do everything we can to provide support at the earliest opportunity to prevent crisis interventions and minimise the number of children and young people in care. We want to work 'with' families and not to do 'to them'. We want families to take ownership of the issues they are facing and to help them build the skills, understanding and confidence to overcome them. Where it is not possible for children to live at home with their families, we will ensure that they are provided with the best start in life. Key to achieving this is ensuring that we find them the right placement in the right place at the right time to best meet their needs. North East Lincolnshire Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there is a range of placements sufficient to meet the needs of the children and young people in the care of the local authority; and to make

³ ["Sufficiency; statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children"](#) DCSFA March 2010

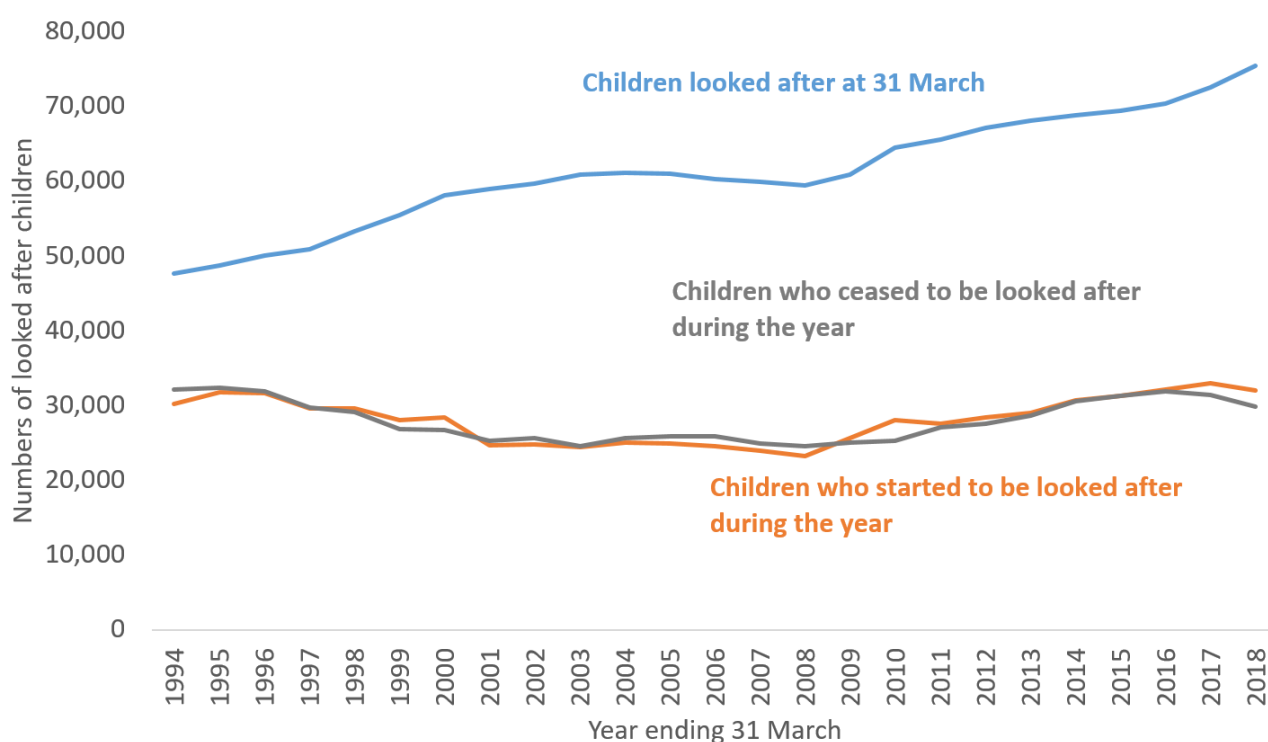
arrangements to promote co-operation with relevant partners to improve the wellbeing of children in the local area.

5.0 National and local context

National Picture

There are currently 75,691 Children looked after Nationally (Department for Education figures) as of 31st March 2018. This equates to an average of 64 children per 10,000. This figures shows an increase of 10% in the four years since 2014. Perhaps most dramatic the last calendar year's increase is up nationally by 3.8%, which is the largest recent rise for many years. More importantly is that even within this upward trend the figures disguise a much larger increase in the more socially deprived Local Authority areas. In the case of North East Lincolnshire's "Statistical Neighbours Local Authority Group" the increase in the last four years has been 25% with an increase in the last year of nearly 11%, to an average of 99 CLA children per 10,000.

Table 1: Number of children starting and ceasing to be looked after in the year and numbers at 31 March [England, year ending 31 March 1994 to 2018, DFE.]



Analysis

These figures also show that there is a shift within society towards more children becoming looked after from the base position of 1994. Prior to this there was a dramatic fall in the numbers of looked after children between the years of 1979-1994. Since 2008 there has been a consistent rise in CLA numbers nationally. From 1997-2008 community based family support and early intervention/help models, to prevent or minimise incidence of family breakdown and to sustain the family unit, became increasingly dominant within social care practice within the UK. The death of

“baby Peter” in Haringey in 2008 in the community, led to a major challenge to this risk management orthodoxy, and is credited as being a major factor in the first major upturn in CLA.

In more recent years, other national factors have fuelled these increases. The increased professional knowledge and understanding and the subsequent publicity around Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) has led to a changed demographic within the CLA system with a number of older teenage girls and boys, becoming looked after, as Local Authorities deem the risks of managing them within community support environments as too high. In a similar vein, there has been a recent increased intelligence around the engagement of vulnerable young people in CCE (Child Criminal Exploitation). This can take a number of forms but commonly is where young people are drawn in to dealing and running drugs for often out of town organised drug gangs (often called “County Lines”). This has led to further interventions from a range of agencies and some increased CLA episodes amongst an older cohort of young people nationally.

This is borne out by the figures which show the increasing age profile of CLA. Children aged 10 years or over now represent a large 62% of the national CLA population.

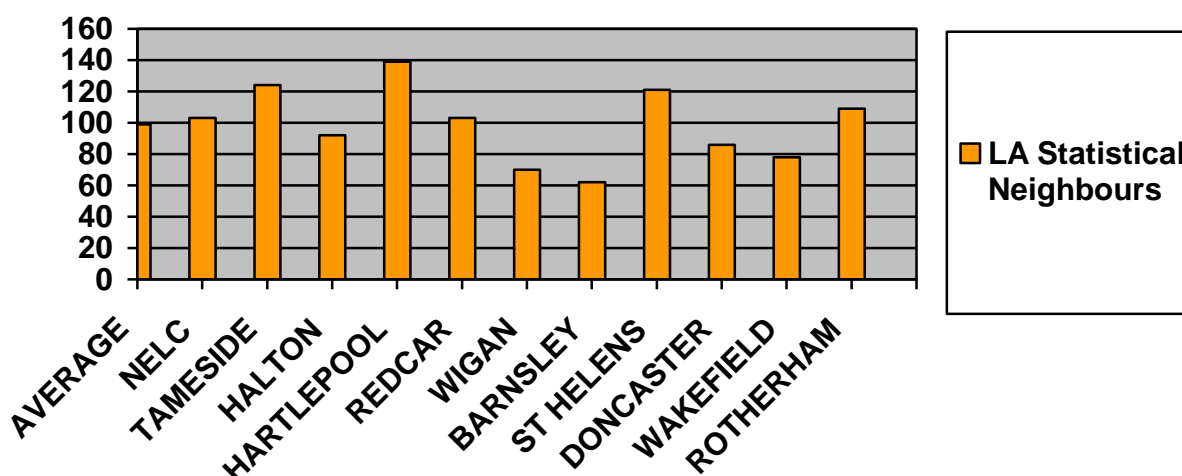
This has not just led to increased pressure on CLA placement sufficiency nationally, but to a remodelling of the care demographic as Local Authorities now have to seek to source teenage and secondary school age placements in much greater numbers. Nationally 73% of the looked after population continued to be placed in foster-care with 11% in Children's Homes. The national sufficiency pressures are reflected in the fact that despite an increased Government focus on the locality of placements, in 2018, nationally, 41% of children looked after were placed outside of their Local Authority boundary area, mostly due to sufficiency pressures.

Other factors that have impacted upon the national picture has been the increase in CLA children looked after by a relative carer, which have increased as a percentage from 14%-18% nationally of the fostered population. It may be the case such arrangements have gone on previously, but are now formalised within the formal fostering process, putting additional pressure on Local Authority Fostering Services, and their staffing resources.

The other major national factor affecting the “looked after” population in the last few years has also been the national policy decision making concerning Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people (UASC). Currently there are 4,480 looked after UASCs, which equates to 6% of the entire CLA population. Of these 80% are over 16 years of age, which inevitably will be a contributory factor in the increase CLA numbers amongst the CLA cohort aged 16 years and older.

North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC) Picture

Although NELC was behind the 2008 curve, there has been a significant increase in numbers of CLA in the area since mid-2012. The figures have risen from about 160 to 354 as of March 31st 2018. This equates to 103 children per 10,000, placing us slightly above the statistical neighbour average of 98.8, but mathematically in the middle of that group of similar local authorities.

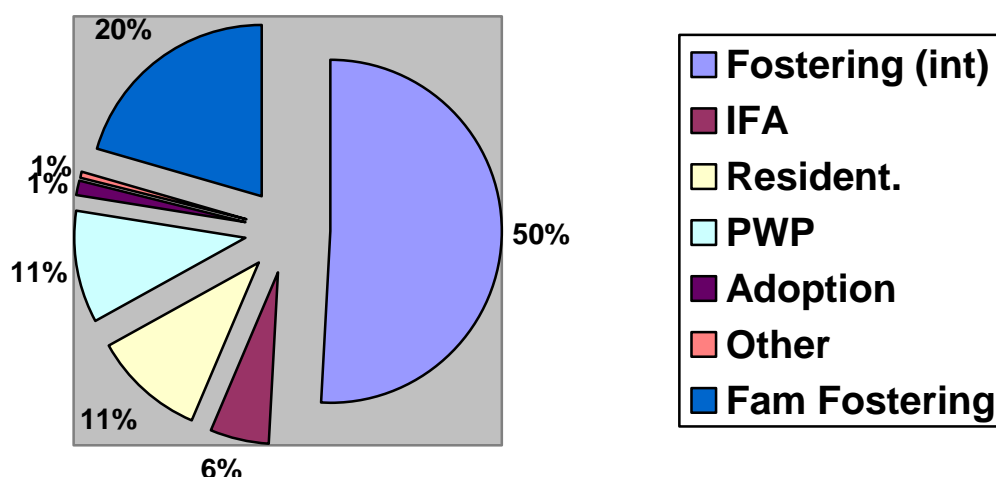
Table 2. Number of Children in Care in England and Wales per 10,000, 2018 [DFE]

In 2016-18 additional NELC allocated additional revenue funding in Children's Social Care increasing CLA placement capacity. This allocation has been injected into all areas recognising the significant growth of family/kinship carers, with both many of those progressing to being kinship foster-carers or seeking to care for family [under Regulation 24 of "The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010"], and also for those family members with financial support on a Child Arrangement order or a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

This investment is on top of the previous financial injection of £1million to build capacity in our restructured front-door services which now composes a MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) team and a CASS (Children's Assessment Safeguarding Service). This has led to a significant reduction in the referral rate.

North East Lincolnshire has always had traditionally high adoption rates as a proportion of its CLA population. Case Law (Re:- BS) and the local stance of the Courts, have ensured that the adoption numbers nationally and regionally have reduced significantly in the last two years, although the number of Adoptions remains creditable within NELC, numbering 19 last year, or 18%, in line with the statistical neighbours average, and well above the 13% national average. This service was recently regionalised from April 2018 as part of the "One Adoption" consortium covering five local Authorities; Hull, East Riding, North Yorkshire, York and ourselves.

The North East Lincolnshire CLA placement distribution shows above average number of our CLA cohort in Foster Care 76% compared to the lower national rates (73%), and an average number of children in residential care (11%) compared to national trends. The age profile of NELC also reflects the increased age of CLA although 56% of NELC CLA children are aged over 10 years of age, which is 6% lower than the national average.



Above - Table 3- NELC Looked After Children (LAC) placements as of 31.03.2018 by distribution.
Source NELC.

Summary

The geographical distribution of NELC placement, reflects our much lower traditional usage of both agency residential and [IFA] agency foster-care, with 76% of our placements being within our very tight Local Authority boundary area, against a national average of 59%. This suggests for a small local authority we are meeting our sufficiency needs far greater than many Council's nationally.

When taken as a suite of indicators for CLA, North East Lincolnshire is very much broadly in line with current trends. The rate of CLA increase, is high and reflective of the experiences of those statistically similar urban local authorities with relatively high levels of social deprivation in their Borough. This means the rate of increase has been higher than the average national picture where these urban spikes have been suppressed by the more economically advantaged rural County areas, in the overall national picture.

6.0 Local levels of need – Children and young people in our care

The needs of CLA in NELC (headline findings from Valuing Care):

- There are four needs which are most prevalent for CLA in NE Lincs. These are related to emotional/mental wellbeing, personal identity and forming family relationships
- Having high needs in the most prevalent areas above is likely to reduce children's resilience when facing difficulties and could lead to more risky decision-making as they get older, resulting in higher needs relating to drugs and alcohol, education and appropriate sexual behaviour
- NE Lincs needs to consider the current interventions available to meet these needs and the

confidence and skills of the workforce in responding to them

- Whilst a small sample, the analysis shows that the longer children are in care, the higher their needs. To lead to more positive outcomes for CLA, NE Lincs needs to be more specific about the needs of individual children, the impact we want to see on these needs over time, and robust ways to measure progress
- There are marked differences in need between genders. Boys overall have higher levels of needs than girls. In particular, boys were assessed to have higher needs relating to educational progress, learning difficulties and managing emotions. NE Lincs needs to consider how its workforce understands, assesses and responds to needs for girls and boys
- The older children are, the higher their needs scores. Transition points are also a key escalation point. This needs to be a focus for support and intervention
- There is minimal correlation between cost and need for children in care in NE Lincs. The analysis highlights some specific cases that appear 'low value' (i.e. are high cost compared to low needs of children). These need further investigation. Similarly, placements of high value (high needs, low cost) need to be understood in terms of lessons around value for money
- Children currently in independent living had the highest average needs (4 cases). Cases with equally high needs were also managed in foster care, with their parents and in residential settings. Current placements for children with high needs should be reviewed to identify opportunities to better support those in residential placements in alternative settings – this would also provide better value. In addition, a review of needs for children placed with parents should also be undertaken to ensure that these needs can be met at home
- On average, children in private provision have higher needs than those in in-house provision. In-house provision demonstrated the best value for money but there is insufficient capacity for high-needs cases. The main needs that drive out of county placements relate to children with needs around mental health and appropriate sexual behaviour. NE Lincs should review its provision to assess whether an internal residential provision or specialist foster carers could be commissioned to meet these needs within NE Lincs borders at better value
- Placements on the White Rose framework offer better value than other private placements. This demonstrates that NE Lincs should actively engage with development of the framework and also review high cost 'off framework' placements to see if these providers are on the White Rose framework.

**Prevalence
of need**

- The most commonly identified needs related to forming positive family relationships, identity and life story, emotional / mental health and self-regulation
- The least commonly identified needs related to drugs and alcohol and sexual behaviour. These needs are most commonly found in older children and are symptomatic of the more prevalent needs listed above
- Children with disabilities were underscored in many areas, possibly because social workers scored these cases relative to the wider child disabilities than the CLA cohort

Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The needs differential between boys and girls was marked and requires further exploration; boys had more severe needs (higher scores) and more complex needs (higher number of needs). This particularly marked for educational progress, emotional / mental health and attachment, suggesting additional support is required here The lowest value placements (high cost for low needs) are more prevalent for boys suggesting a different pricing and potential risk taking approach from providers and commissioners which needs better analysis
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs scores increase with age and peak at key development milestones Transition is a key vulnerability point for children and requires more dedicated support to reduce the escalation of needs
Time in care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average needs scores increased the longer a child had been looked after. This suggests that whilst care may be reducing risks for children, it is not leading to improvements in needs and outcomes overall. This is a key find in terms of ensuring care is focused on specifically improving the needs of this group children Tracking needs and outcomes over time for each child would identify escalations in needs and where alternative interventions are necessary
Provision type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fostering covers children across the range of needs and offers the best value for money Agency residential offers the lowest value for money (highest cost placements, regardless of needs) Children in independent living placements and placed with parents have high levels of needs, higher in some case than in residential care This needs review to ensure LA has an appropriate risk appetite for this group and to consider whether there are opportunities to meet the needs of some children currently in the residential provision in other provision, if broader support was in place around specific needs
In-house vs agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is limited correlation between needs and cost across all placements in NELC, indicating a real opportunity to use Valuing Care scores to shape provision and negotiate on price In-house provision demonstrated the best value for money (able to manage high needs at low cost) There is insufficient capacity in in-house provision for high-needs cases (children placed in private provision had higher needs but cases with similar levels of need are being managed by in-house provision) NEL does not currently proactively engage with the market and has limited influence on the type and cost of agency provision. Providers surveyed would welcome this dialogue
White Rose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whilst overall there is very limited correlation between needs and cost, for children placed on the White Rose framework there is more of a correlation which appears to show that White Rose framework placements offer better value for money across all needs scores when compared to other agency placements Non-framework agency placements are more commonly used for children with higher needs scores. This may indicate insufficient capacity in White Rose and / or be driven by provider practice of rejecting these cases as 'framework placements' and charging higher spot purchase costs
Foster carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information given to foster carers about a child or young person's needs is variable and can limit the quality of care provided Foster carers would welcome a standardised approach for all those involved in a child's care to understand needs and progress

These findings about our CLA population have informed several key recommendations for this sufficiency strategy, including:

- Developing a strategy for foster carer recruitment, training and support, including a focus on life story work for children and a better articulation of the needs of children and how they change over time.
- The need to understand and differentiate the support required for boys and girls.
- The need to consider alternative local provision for children who exhibit needs around sexually harmful behaviour and complex mental health due to a lack of local provision in NE Lincs.
- The need for greater engagement with private providers, particularly those within the White Rose framework, as the analysis of needs versus cost has demonstrated these placements offer better value for money than those not on a framework.

Sufficiency

We seek as part of our Commissioning Strategy to provide at least 80% of the CLA placements we require, within the Local Authority's area, or immediate environs, despite our tight geographic boundaries. The decision to do this is because of our tradition of priding ourselves as a borough, on providing placement sufficiency. To achieve this figure of 80% we aim to have continual improvement. We have recently engaged analysts to audit and test our placement commissioning to reassure that this strategy develops improved outcomes, and value for money by this existing approach. The results below inform that our Strategy does give reassurance as to this philosophy. They also rightly identify areas for further development which are informed by both our audit of the 2016-18 Strategy, and the findings of this latest research.⁴

Strengths

The research shows that often those children with the greatest measured needs are looked after in the most value-for-money placements within this locality by in-house services.

⁴ NELC Valuing Care; Interim Report. December 2018



Table 4- Impower research into a sample of NELC LAC cases in 2018.

Our higher than average use of in-house placements has mean that the national presenting IFA scarcity issues have affected us less that other Local Authorities (LA). NELC Fostering is still the major provider for our CLA market, providing more in-house placements than the national average, and 25% more in-house placements than the average within Yorkshire and the Humber. The current figure on in-borough LA placements stands at 76%, in March 2018. NELC believes therefore it is a reasonable target to seek to achieve the target of 80% as part of the new sufficiency strategy.

Currently we have 165 Fostering Households, (including Regulation 24 fostering families undergoing assessment). This year we have recruited an additional 6 households with an extra capacity of 15 CLA bed spaces. Unfortunately after netting off the retirements and de-registrations (9 beds), there has been a net gain but of modest extra capacity of 6 beds. Whilst many Local Authorities have lost net capacity this additional supply in NELC is dwarfed by the extra demand on placements.

GAPS, CHALLENGES

Fostering

The rapid nature of the increase in looked after numbers has however led to a revision of this strategy. Previously the Local Authority was only an ad-hoc occasional user of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements (using only one in 2011/12). The increased number has led to a saturation of the available in-house fostering resources necessitating the use of 19 IFA beds currently in 2017-2018.

Against this backdrop the Council has joined the Regional Contracting White Rose (Yorkshire and the Humber) Consortium for both residential and foster care placements. This contract has helped to ensure financial parity for North East Lincolnshire as a small Unitary Authority getting the same prices as larger Borough's. We have sought to use the contract to help ensure fostering sufficiency within the local area, when our own in-house resources are unavailable.

More recently with the national pressures on the CLA system, member Local Authorities of the White Rose Framework have reported placement scarcity in 2018, particularly from those IFA providers. Placements on the White Rose framework offer better value than other private placements. This demonstrates that NE Lincs should actively engage with development of the framework and review high cost spot-purchased placements to secure better value.

This has necessitated some off contract usage within 2017-2018, and led to a revised fostering recruitment initiative within NELC with the aim of promoting in-house capacity for harder to place groups such as teenagers.

The research again shows that where Agency placements are required, far superior value for money is afforded by Framework placements.

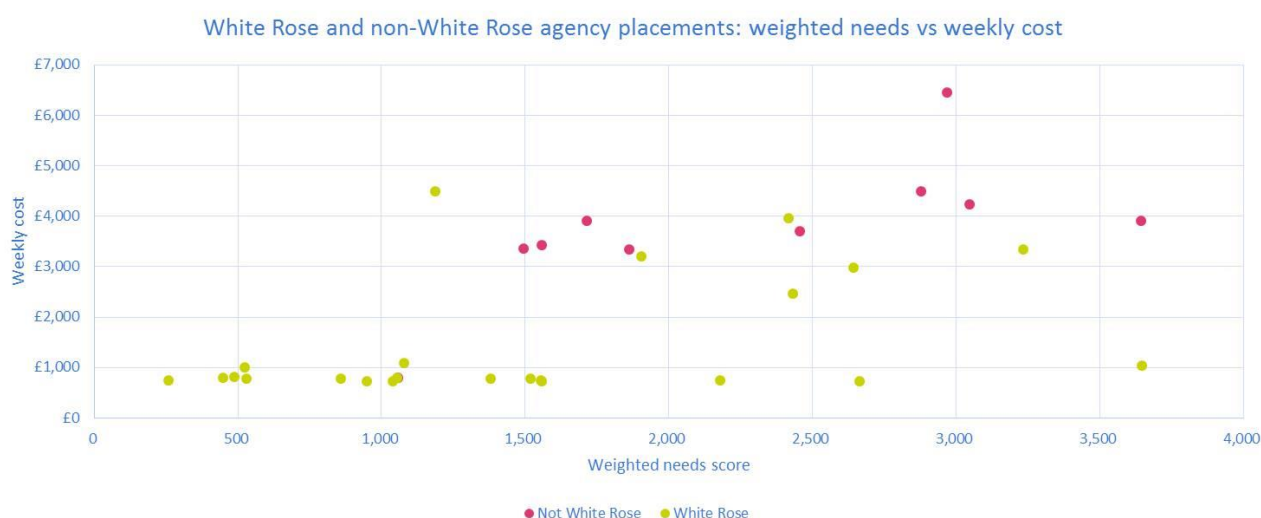


Table 5 – Cost of Framework placements when compared to spot purchase placements. Impower, 2018

Residential & Re-provision

Although NELC continues to be a sizeable provider of in-house residential care for geographical reasons, due to our relatively small local authority boundaries, we do currently have 8 young people placed out of borough. Given this demand we seek to source these placements through the White Rose Framework for residential care. Currently many of these placements are allied to an education requirement when the local schools are unable to provide an education offer for some young people. Often these placements source the educational deficit alongside a care placement. In the case of some young people subject to an educational, health & care plan (EHCP), they are moved around a lack of education resource in borough, rather than a care placement locally.

The Council has consciously sought to move to a model of owning its Children's Homes after an era of renting half and owning half of our children's homes. Our homes are generally smaller, in size and modelled on normalised family homes. The Council Cabinet has sanctioned the planned like-for-like re-provision of our Cleethorpes Children's Home by an agreed capital purchase in the forthcoming year 2018/19.

NEW INITIATIVES

Previous Audit

After reviewing and auditing the previous Sufficiency Strategy (see Appendix 2) we have determined some of the gaps that had existed, which were preventing us from achieving sustainable outcomes for our CLA young people.

Staying Close

One of the identified gaps was the different ways in which young people leaving residential care, had to leave at 18 years, whereas their peers in Foster Care have the opportunity to “Stay Put”. North East Lincolnshire Council were successful in being a Government pilot project and received the largest allocation of innovation funding nationally towards our proposals to level this playing field.

As part of the staying close pilot young people in residential care homes complete an agreement which identifies who they want to support them when they move out, where they want to live when they leave the home whether it's when they are 16 or 18 years of age. In recent consultations with the young people the main issues raised are young people worrying about being lonely and isolated and being able to manage their money.

Staying Close is a pilot scheme which enables young people leaving residential care to live near to, and retain links with, their children's homes, the scheme stops short of offering those in residential care the same right to stay in care until they are 21 as those in foster care receive under Staying Put arrangements. Currently young people leaving residential care go from 24 hour residential support to minimal or no support which can lead them to being unprepared for independent adult life. For some young people this can result in homelessness, unemployment and engaging in criminal activity. Staying Close is designed to prove that by providing support to young people past the age of 18 their chances in life are much improved. In two years' time the pilots will be evaluated to test what has worked across the range of schemes, in particular evaluating the outcomes achieved for young people through the projects. Following the evaluation Staying Close will be rolled out nationally, like Staying Put.

North East Lincolnshire's pilot includes encouraging the young person in helping to develop a package of support which includes an agreement. The expectation is to start the support just before or just after they are 16 years old. The plan will include details on key professional relationships that will be maintained over the period of 16 years – 21 years.

A Peer Mentoring Programme will be established for young people to initially be supported through the programme but latterly for them to become peer supports themselves. A bespoke approach will be applied to meet the needs of the individual. The young people will be asked to identify a worker that they want to remain in contact with and to continue to support them. The identified worker doesn't always have to be a Residential Worker if the young person would prefer support from an alternative profession our “Staying Close offer” will budget to commission support time from others (e.g. youth workers). The support offered is defined entirely by the needs of the young person such as help sustaining tenancy, attending the Job Centre or even support to attend anti-natal classes. This work would be a far more tailored intense package than that currently offered by the 16+ Personal Advisor (PA) role.

The Staying Close pilot includes;

- Developing Signs of Safety based “Staying Close” agreements with care leavers
- Working with partners to secure suitable accommodation and improved transitional support (e.g. housing and mental health services)
- Develop a process for releasing identified workers’ “hours”, enabling them to continue supportive relationships with care leavers
- Use of Family Group Conferencing (FGC) or Family Network Meetings to ensure an effective support network is in place for each young person prior to leaving care
- Commission equivalent support for young people leaving out of borough placements
- Develop our workforce on issues facing 18+ care leavers (e.g. gaining employment, loneliness, budgeting...)

Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP – the local social housing provider). Our established working relationships with LHP have enabled us to appoint a part time Housing support officer who has developed a tenancy training program to support care leavers as part of Staying Close

Staying Close provides drop-in sessions on Sundays and Wednesdays which provides an additional universal offer to the “Staying Close” group bringing together other care leavers, to meet, eat and chat in groups. One to one support is available such as advice from a substance misuse worker, careers advisor and health and a well-being practitioner

Care leavers stability in tenancy/ home & financially independent.

Of the 16 young people currently engaging in the staying close pilot 2 have moved into registered support settings/care with Adult Social Care. Six have their own tenancies and are being supported with this all of which aims to become entirely independent maintaining their own tenancies at some point throughout the process.

We have 1 homeless young person who we are working closely with their PA and the young person to find appropriate housing however he is very particular about what he wants so we are finding this a challenge. The remaining young people are either in LA placements or the Foyer working towards their independence.

Specialist Education Provision and Allied Children's Homes

As stated, one factor which has driven some expensive out of borough placements, for NELC CLA was the lack of school facilities for this cohort. NELC Cabinet embraced a proposal to open two new five bedded children's homes, where the education would be guaranteed by a procured proven education provider. Two potential children's homes to provide the care base are being sought and an education facility in NEL will be ready for a September 2019 start.

It is believed that such an initiative will lead to:

- some out of borough young people being returned to their locality, enabling them to recommence a relationship with their families and friends.
- It will also assist the prevention of further children having to move out of borough for educationally driven care planning reasons.
- The opportunity to provide scope to assist neighbouring local authorities in helping meet their placements needs within the region.

- Better transparent outcomes, and the ability to coordinate services around our CLA needs within their own local area.

7.0 Voice of the Child

We engage regularly with our children and young people to understand what they would like to happen and we ensure that their voices shape the way we deliver our services. We have a range of ways that we support and encourage young people to have their voices heard and these include:

- Attendance at Our Voice; Listen Up – a monthly council meeting for children looked after
- Attendance at the quarterly Regional Council for Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Attendance at the weekly Sunday and Wednesday drop-in's for care leavers
- Question Time events with Leadership Team
- Viewpoint electronic survey for children looked after and care leavers
- Advocacy Service for children looked after and care leavers – to support children's voices to be heard at meetings where decisions are made about them
- Annual CLA Health Fun Day
- Termly participation events; ie, Art Day
- Fostering reviews
- Foster placement exit interviews

Our commitment to listening and acting on the voices of children looked after and care leavers is made clear in our Corporate Parenting Pledge and our Local Offer for Care Leavers.

More details about the key things that young people have told us they would like to happen can be found in the "Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy"

8.0 Public Sector Equality Duty

All policies that are developed or reviewed by North East Lincolnshire Council have due regard to the aims of the Equality Duty including ensuring that no-one is treated in any way less favourably on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or marriage & civil partnership.

Principles for the type of placements we provide

The importance of a stable family life

Children and young people have the right to family life within a permanent and stable family environment, where they feel safe and are encouraged to meet their full potential. We believe that, wherever possible, this should occur within the child's family or extended family network.

Strengthening Families

We will continue to work with families and develop early intervention services to strengthen families' abilities to care for and parent their children and achieve a stable family life. We will identify and manage associated risks in a multi-agency arena.

Clear Assessment of Need

Children and young people will not be accommodated (except in a real emergency), unless an assessment of need indicates there are no other viable arrangements within their family, extended family, or community network and which indicates that accommodation would be an appropriate way of meeting their needs.

The Right Placement

The assessment of need will indicate whether a residential or foster placement would be the preferred placement. Children aged 11 years and under will always be placed in foster care unless there are exceptional needs which require a residential placement. We will consider shared care arrangements where appropriate. Consideration will always be given to the child's culture, ethnic origin, religion and language. Every effort will be made to place siblings together unless the assessment of need indicates that this would not be in their best interests.

Partnership and Communication

Parents' wishes will be sought and, wherever possible, any decision to accommodate a child will be taken in collaboration with the child's parents and the child or young person. Children and young people's views will be listened to and taken into account.

Placement Stability

We aim to place children with carers who are appropriately skilled, trained and supported to meet their needs, including managing challenging behaviour so that placements endure for as long as they are required. We are committed to supporting carers, including residential carers, to achieve stability for looked after children. NELC has achieved excellent stability rates for its CLA children in recent years and is committed to continue this trend, despite the pressures posed by the burgeoning numbers of children in our CLA system.

Geography

We are committed to maintaining links for the child within their own family and local network. We believe that maintaining a child within the local community gives them access to supportive relationships, networks and services which will be beneficial to the child into adulthood. When a child or young person needs to be accommodated they will be placed as near to their home as possible within Borough, unless this is inconsistent with safeguarding the child's best interests. We will always aim to continue existing school placements.

Planning for Permanence

We are committed to achieving permanence for children within an appropriate timescale. Where children are not to return to their family network we will identify an appropriate long term placement. When this is via the Adoption route, we will aim to avoid delay and keep this within the appropriate timescales.

Staying Put

We recognise that the average age for leaving home is 25 and will encourage young people to remain in their placement until they leave care at 18. We will offer the opportunity to remain with foster carers to 21 years and will enable young people to remain in residential care to 19 where appropriate.

Value for Money

We are committed to providing placements which deliver on both quality and cost and will regularly review our in-house provision against these criteria, as well as out of borough placements which are procured via the regional contracting process.

Personalisation

Wherever possible we will tailor our provision to meet the individual needs of children and young people in our care. This may involve opening up new provision in an emergency or adapting existing provision to suit individual circumstances.

Prevention

NELC have a host of services that work to prevent the need for placements in the first place, details in Appendix 1, reducing the need for council care by strengthening early help to those on the edge of care and providing support to families when they need it.

9.0 Aims (long term outcomes)

- We will keep our children safe and settled
- Accommodation is a key area for improvement, to improve the quality of provision and ensure there is more choice in suitability of accommodation.
- New governance arrangements through the Corporate Parenting Board
- All placement settings will have Good or Outstanding ratings from Ofsted
- Succession planning for carers
- Reduce the need for council care through effective early support to minimise entry into the care system with in-house preventative services
- Establish clear intent that all placements are the only placement for as long as needed
- Placements should
 - Be nearer to home and within our area
 - Minimise disruption to education, training and social / community needs and ties
 - Let brothers and sisters live together
 - Meet the needs of disabled children and children from ethnic minority backgrounds

10.0 Objectives (short-term outcomes)

- Placement sufficiency meets needs
- Continued lower-than-National-average use of IFA (interim fostering arrangements)
- Recruit and support foster carers, use the Valuing Care tool to identify and support them and the children in their care
- Increased recruitment activity for carers
- Better matching across a range of ethnicity and religion and gender-focused needs
- Minimise the use of bed & breakfasts for care leavers and 16plus (conduct risk assessments where they are used)
- Placements feel like home – where possible, young people receive information about the placement in advance and are listened to if they have any concerns
- Better individual care planning
- A young-person centred approach, focusing on the needs of the child
- Consider alternative local provision for children who exhibit needs around sexually harmful

behaviour and complex mental health due to a lack of local provision in North East Lincolnshire

- Ensure value for money in procurement of agency placements

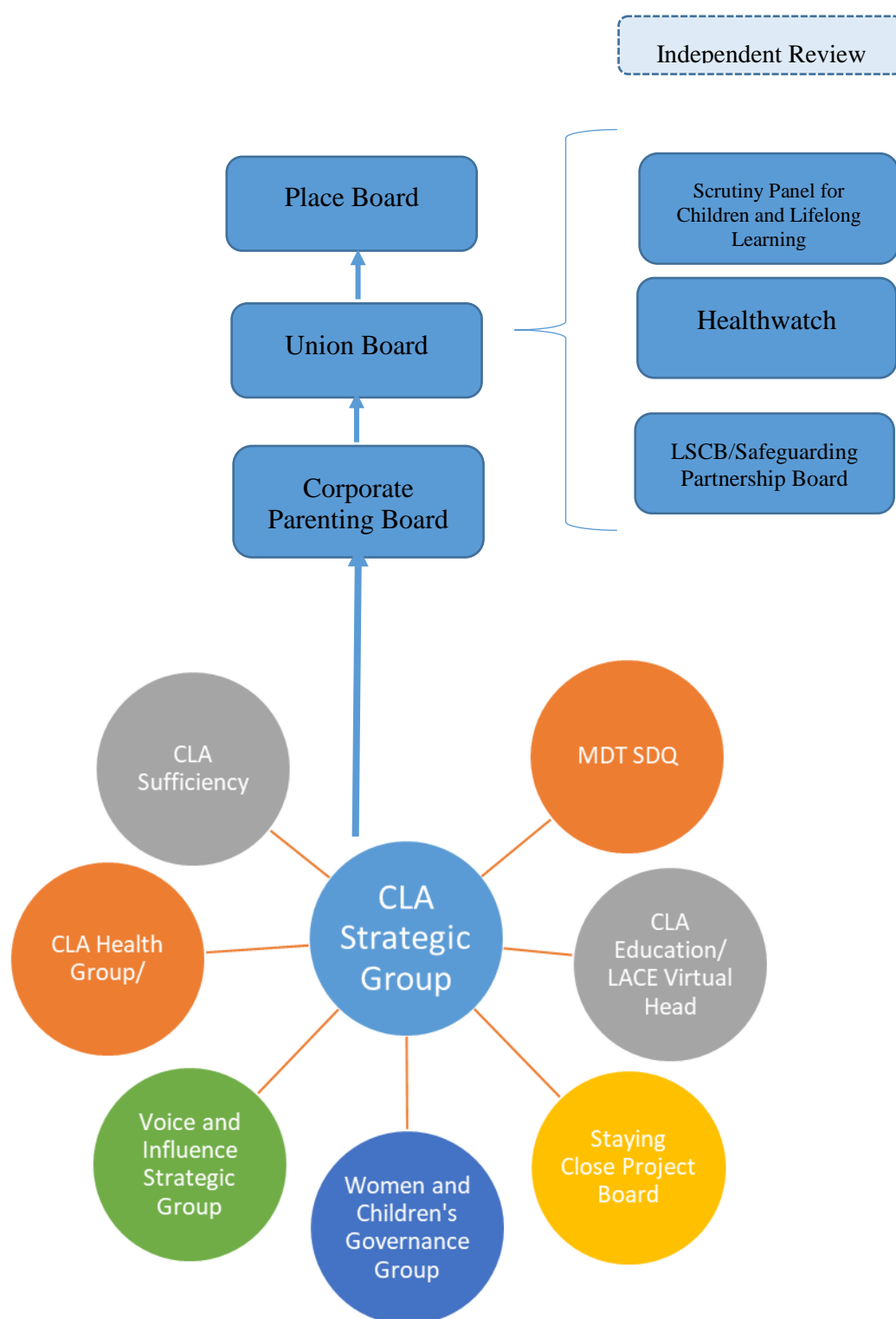
11.0 Wider Strategic outcomes

We recognise the importance of enabling children to start and develop well and how important it is to have the best possible start. Every child will be brought up by supportive and nurturing families. This document focuses on sufficiency and quality and appropriateness of available placements for children looked after of all backgrounds and needs. The Children Looked After Strategy discusses the wider, overarching strategic direction for services to meet the needs of children looked after.

12.0 Governance Arrangements and performance monitoring

North East Lincolnshire has an established model of Corporate Parenting. It includes well-defined decision making processes in the council with clear links to the Children in Care Council. The Council regularly reviews how we deliver these functions and that there are tangible outcomes through active and regular feedback from the children and young people. Members of the Corporate Parenting Board provide the collective leadership required to improve outcomes for children in care. Partners provide the additional commitment to children in care that a parent who is ambitious for their children would make. The CLA Strategic Group in the first instance will own this Sufficiency Strategy with oversight by the Corporate Parenting board.

Children Looked After and Care Leavers Governance Structure



13.0 Related Documents

- ["Sufficiency; statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children"](#) DCSFA, March 2010
- NELC Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy
- [Corporate Parenting Strategy](#)
- Valuing Care project: Interim report December 2019
- Care Leavers' Accommodation Strategy
- Local Offer for Care Leavers
- CLA Placed Out of Area policy
- Permanency policy
- Impact Assessment
- Action Plan for delivery of this strategy

Appendix 1 - Current North East Lincolnshire In-House Service Profiles and Provisions in Placement Sufficiency

NEL Fostering Service

As the dominant provider of CLA resources, the Local Authority continues to be a big provider of in-house Foster placements. We have 107 fostering households and currently 200⁵ children via a range of payment schemes. This includes a number 38 of those approved as family foster carers. Many of these are often temporarily approved under Regulation 24 of the Fostering Regulations, and do not become long term approved foster carers often choosing Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) Child Arrangement Orders (CAO). The figure is 68% of our NELC CLA in our foster homes, but this also equates to 91% of all our fostered children. Furthermore, 70 kinship carers are currently under assessment⁶ and so consider temporary foster carers. We already have 22 approved kinship carers.

NEL Adoption Agency

After a period where the proportion of CLA becoming adopted was very low, the 31% children adopted in 2010, and 20% in 2016 made this a major exit route for Children leaving the Care System, and returned some of the best performance in terms of number of Children Adopted in the Country. NEL a small authority and, for reasons of privacy and confidentiality as well as occasional safety, the authority has to regularly find adoptive families from other local authorities and adoption agencies in which to place those children needing adoptive families. Adoption placements made by North East Lincolnshire Council follow the route of checking if there are any NELC approved families to meet the need, followed by immediate referral to the regional consortium. There is follow up to the National Adoption Register after 3 months, if there is no regional link being pursued.

The arrangement of having a regional database for children and families which is operated by the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium continues to be the most useful way of locating families speedily for the majority of our children. A recruitment strategy of recruiting and assessing prospective adopters from outside of the borough has proved successful with over a third of placements in 2016 being matched to NELC approved adopters. The need to look more widely to national resources remains necessary and there have been a number of highly successful placements made with adoptive families at considerable distance. The stability of placements made is generally very good indeed with only one placement of an older child failing in the last three and a half years. It is still positive to report that children still wait less long in NELC than in our national and regional comparators.

North East Lincolnshire considers all children in respect of adoption and does not rule them out of this permanency option due to age, complex health or behavioural issues. We consistently remain an authority with a high number of children adopted post five years and with one of the highest percentage of children adopted from care compared nationally. Two of the children adopted were over five years old, in 2015.

⁵ Figures correct at 31 March 2016

⁶ Correct at Feb 19

Mainstream Residential

- Long term; Grimsby
 - A 5 bedded Children's Home which opened in 2012 providing long-term care for Children. This facility is near the Town Centre and close to all major amenities. The purchase of a facility in a traditional street is part of the Local Authority's plans for its Children's Home to be more anonymous parts of their community, and also reflect latest Department of Education (DfE) thinking that Children's Homes should not be relocated in the most disadvantaged communities.
- Bungalow
 - Our bungalow is originally designed for learning and physical disabilities, it is registered with Ofsted for 2 young people. Due to pressures on mainstream CLA demand we have currently re-designated this facility for mainstream youngsters.
- Grimsby
 - This house provides care and accommodation for up to 4 children/ young people with emotional and/ or behavioural difficulties (EBD) between the ages of 11 and 18 year on a medium to long term basis. This is a large; tastefully decorated detached house in a residential area. It is on a main bus route and is close to local parks, shops, colleges, hospital and is next to the Leisure Centre. The front of the property has a driveway and small lawn, the rear has a large garden with a small fish pond, both have established plants and trees. Inside the property there are communal areas with TV's and modern fittings to the bathrooms and kitchen. It reflect latest DfE thinking that Children's Homes should not be relocated in the most disadvantaged communities
- Cleethorpes
 - There is a 3 bedded residential home run by North East Lincolnshire Council to provide care for young people aged 11 to 18 years of age, of either gender, who, for whatever reason, cannot live at home or in an alternative substitute care setting. Young people are admitted to this accommodation after a process of assessment and planning where ever possible. At times due to a young person's needs, it may be necessary to continue the care beyond their 18th birthday.

Specialists CLA & Independence Facilities

- Grimsby
 - This facility acts as a specialist provision offering short term respite or providing a medium term placement, to children with specialist complex needs which require intensive 1:1 care in a discreet setting. In 2006, the building underwent a major refurbishment and the standard of accommodation now on offer is of high quality, modern and fit for the purpose that it is to be used for.
- Grimsby

- Four facilities are similar buildings to that described above. These facilities are unregistered for Ofsted purposes and have been used to accommodate care leavers needing to learn additional life skills in a training environment. They operate as half-way houses, providing accommodation with some support until young people are fully able to sustain tenancies of their own, or can move into the contracted provisions of our partners. We have successfully used this model to facilitate our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) programme and currently house 6 UASC in two of the properties.
- Grimsby
 - This is a 3 bedded respite unit offering overnight breaks for mainstream, vulnerable young people. This is targeted at the most appropriate and needy cases, therefore potentially preventing family breakdowns and young people coming into care.

Children Looked After Disability Resources inc Respite and Complex Health

- Grimsby
 - The function of our bungalow is to provide shared or long term care for children and families that have been assessed as requiring this level of service. These services are provided in the form of care for children with a Learning Disability, including Autism, but may also have a physical disability or illness that does not require the level of care provided by a Nursing Home. This bungalow provides a service for four children and young people that have a disability, including a learning disability.
 - The registration permits another of our homes to provide care for up to three children with learning disabilities who are unable to live either in the family home or at the time of admission, a foster placement.
- Units
 - These units provide Short Term Breaks for families, these services are provided in the form of overnight visits for children and young people with a disability.
- Short Break Service
 - Alongside providing domiciliary care and support to parents / carers for children diagnosed with a disability / complex health needs, the Short Break Service has a seaside chalet in Cleethorpes. Any person within the UK with a disability can request and book a stay in the chalet between March-December every year. The chalet has 3 bedrooms and is fully adapted for people with a physical disability, the chalet is level access, has a wet room and the use of a hoist. Passes for the adjacent leisure & amusement facilities are also included.

The service also has a caravan on a seaside site. Any child and their family who are receiving a service from the Children's Disability Service can request a stay in the caravan for a short break with their family.

Regulated Settings

Type / Location	Description	Capacity (beds)
Foster homes	80 foster homes providing a variable number of beds	150 (approx.)
Grimsby	long-term CLA teenagers with EBD issues from 11-18 years	5
Grimsby	four long-term CLA teenagers with EBD issues from 11-18 years	4
Grimsby	Long term home for up to four young people, intake.	4
Grimsby	bed for specialist pieces of work (not permanently operational)	1
Grimsby	four disabled autistic young people aged 10-18	4
Grimsby	CLA Unit	2
Grimsby	three disabled autistic young people aged 10-18	3





Respite Regulated Settings




Location / Type	Description	Capacity (beds)
Grimsby	overnight respite for EBD youngsters	3
Grimsby	Four respite beds for physical LD	4
Grimsby	Four respite beds for autistic LD	4
Concordat for PACE	Retained foster carer, use of emergency CH bed	1 - 2





Other Accommodation




Location	Description	Capacity (beds)
Grimsby	Care Leaver's accommodation	2
Grimsby	Care Leaver's accommodation	2
Grimsby	Care Leaver's accommodation	2
Grimsby	Care Leaver's accommodation	2
Cleethorpes	6 Berth Caravan, is available for families with disabled children	
Cleethorpes	3 bedded fully PD equipped holiday home, for LD or PD families	3


Appendix 2 – Audit of Outgoing 2016 – 2018 Strategy

Proposal	Details	Progress	Achievement
(i) Fostering and Adoption Proposals for 2015-18			
Recruitment, Allowances and Placement Choice	<p>As fostering remains the placement model of choice for most looked after children within North East Lincolnshire, NELC's fostering service will seek to maintain both a dominant market share and healthy performance within both its local market and also when subject to regional comparison and benchmarking</p> <p>Our aims for 2016-2018 are recruitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older children and teenagers with complex needs and challenging behaviour. • The need to ensure that resources enable siblings to be maintained in foster placements without resource deficits requiring their splitting. 	<p>We have continued to seek to recruit to bolster our fostering resources.</p> <p>A six-bed increased net in-house fostering capacity during 2016-18.</p> <p>The resourcing of sibling placements within a sole foster-care resources remain challenging.</p>	 
Foster Carer Support	<p>As support to carers has been shown to be a major contributory factor in both carer recruitment and retention and placement stability, support services must be sufficient to undertake the training and development of carers required to respond to the increasing complexity of children's needs.</p> <p>The fostering service must maintain the capacity to both</p>	<p>A buddy system is being developed for Carers to have Peer-on-peer support in 2017-2018. This is not operational as yet.</p> <p>Fostering Link Officer have been protected, and increased by two whole-time-equivalent posts despite the Local Authority budget pressures.</p>	 

	support and train its carers but also to engage in recruitment activity		
Independent Fostering Agency Placement Commissioning	<p>Although geographic need has always driven some IFA usage the reality of a CLA (Children Looked After) population of 300+, requires additional resources from our lower accustomed levels.</p> <p>We are one of the number of local authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber that have joined the White Rose Regional Commissioning Consortium, led by Leeds City Council to ensure competitive value for money out of the current IFA placements that we do use.</p>	<p>We currently are using 18 IFA places, which in percentage terms is well below the Local Authority norm, and below the budgeted provision which is for 20.</p> <p>The current sufficiency difficulties is making placements via the Framework difficult to resource with many having a zero match return</p>	
Fostering to Adopt	Our Adoption Agency has identified families that may be appropriate for approval under the Government's simplification of the rules around fostering to adopt.	Already in 2015 two children have been placed under this legislation	
Secure Accommodation	Neither NELC or the other Humber authorities provide any Secure Accommodation	A number of temporary arrangements in place have been necessary in 2016-2018 due to lack of Secure Provision nationally.	
ii) Disability			
Resources for CLA Disability	There is a need for Disability CLA Accommodation, despite us opening an additional disability home for three CLA youngsters, in 2014.	We currently have 7 disability CLA, six earmarked CLA disability residential beds.	

Full Service Offer	To meet the Full Service Offer for children with disabilities, all local authorities are required to provide domiciliary care services in the home. This must include overnight care, as well as day care.	NELC Short Break Service is registered with Care Quality Commission (CQC) to provide Domiciliary Services (Rated Good in 2018), providing day care to children/young people with autism, and has provided families with an overnight within the family home.	
iii) Residential			
Responding to the Government's Agenda for safer locations for Children's Homes	The Council has relocated its Children's homes, over the last ten years with a spread in many of the NELC communities.	Financial approval was given for a relocation of our last rented Children's Home property within the Cleethorpes community. An identified resource is being looked for.	
Emergency Accommodation	The availability of a specific unit has provided an additional resource for Emergency Respite, to those provided by Fostering.	The property was purchased by NELC in 2018, securing it as part of the NELC estate	
Use of Agency Residential	The higher CLA numbers have required additional use of out of borough Agency Residential. This is approved via the Resource Allocation Meeting (RAM) process. The Council seeks to return these young people to their community and will prioritise a multi-agency approach to risk manage CSE more often within a supportive local community approach. We also seek to maintain young people in their community recognising that with the publication of the Casey Report external placement options for young people with risk taking and potential vulnerabilities to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) or missing episodes, seldom	We are one of the number of local authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber that joined the White Rose Regional Commissioning Consortium, led by Leeds City Council. Recent matches have reduced because of a lack of national CLA capacity	

	alleviate risks. In fact they often are less visible and more anonymous in such situations		
Secure Residential Accommodation	Neither NELC or the other Humber authorities provide any Secure Accommodation	A number of temporary arrangements with DOLs in place have been necessary in 2016-2018 due to lack of Secure Provision nationally.	
(iv) Other Strategic Considerations			
Concordat for Remanded and Detained Young People [PACE S38]	Following renewed Home Office advice with regard to Local Authority's providing accommodation under S.38 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE), for children in Police Custody for whom overnight stay in Police Cells is deemed inappropriate	We utilise capacity at the respite mainstream facility which maintains an Emergency Bed. We are looking at bolstering these provisions given the current demand, to have further potential options for when the existing resources are full.	
Develop further the main Facility	<p>This facility will be further developed to provide a full-time care option and family support, as it is currently now operation 365 days a year.</p> <p>The need for foster carers to have additional support to help prevent placement breakdowns has also been identified. Currently, the provision of other mainstream respite breaks is limited.</p> <p>The service will extend to offer a range of outreach provisions, and continues to provide a supportive day offer to some children excluded from schools.</p>	Facility now operates 365 24/7.	

<p><i>Continue to prepare value for money comparators for in-house provisions</i></p>	<p>The recognition of the extreme pressure on Local Government finance requires ongoing review of service costs and the value for money afforded by in-house and external provisions.</p>	<p>Consultants "Impower" have undertaken some work on CLA in 2018, which demonstrates that in-house LA placements afford VFM.</p>	
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